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THE WHITE CITY AND THE ENGLISH CATHEDRALS

BY CHARLES TURNER.

Illustrated from recent photographs of English Cathedrals.

WHY did the White City by the Lakes burst upon the American public like a revelation? The answer is: Because, for the first time in the history of the



THE CATHEDRAL OF CANTERBURY.

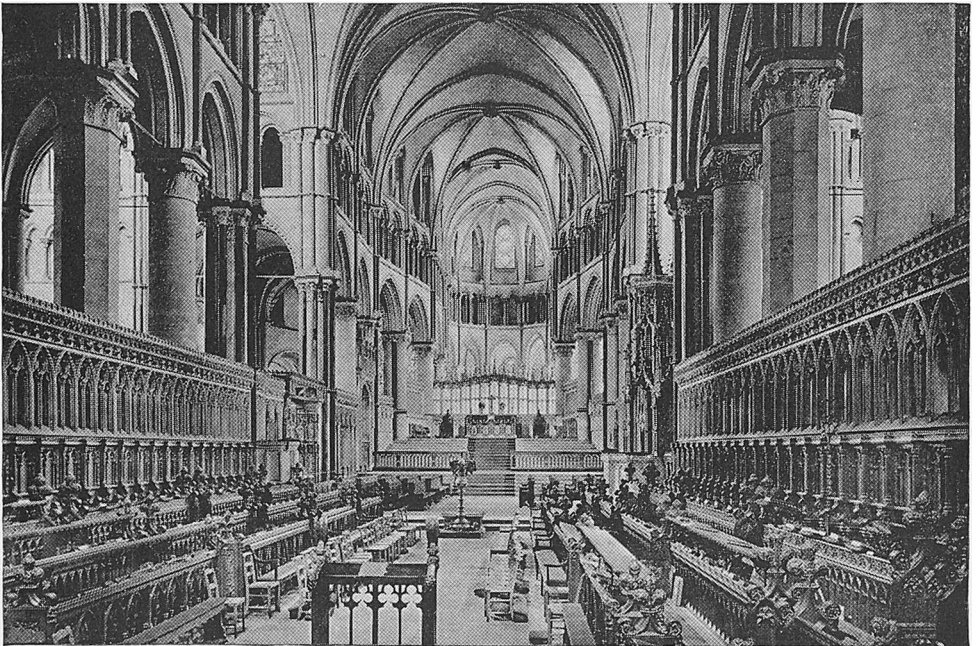
nation, American architects had the same opportunities of site and setting, of grouping and surroundings, as those with which the architects of old created their masterpieces. For once the modern and the ancient conditions were brought together; for once the American architect had the chance to stage his effects, to group his masses, to marshal his outlines, to blend the play of light and shade, to select environment, to secure the softening grace of perspective; and, for once, the spectator could take in *from many points and from afar*, these proportions, these contours, these masses and these blendings, with all the advantage of atmospheric play and the subtle charms of intervening water and foliage.

It was the architect's opportunity to show that the artistic capacity which, con-



ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL, IN LONDON.

ditions being favorable, has never failed the human race in any land or clime, had hitherto, in America, lacked only the opportunity to lay under its spell the material



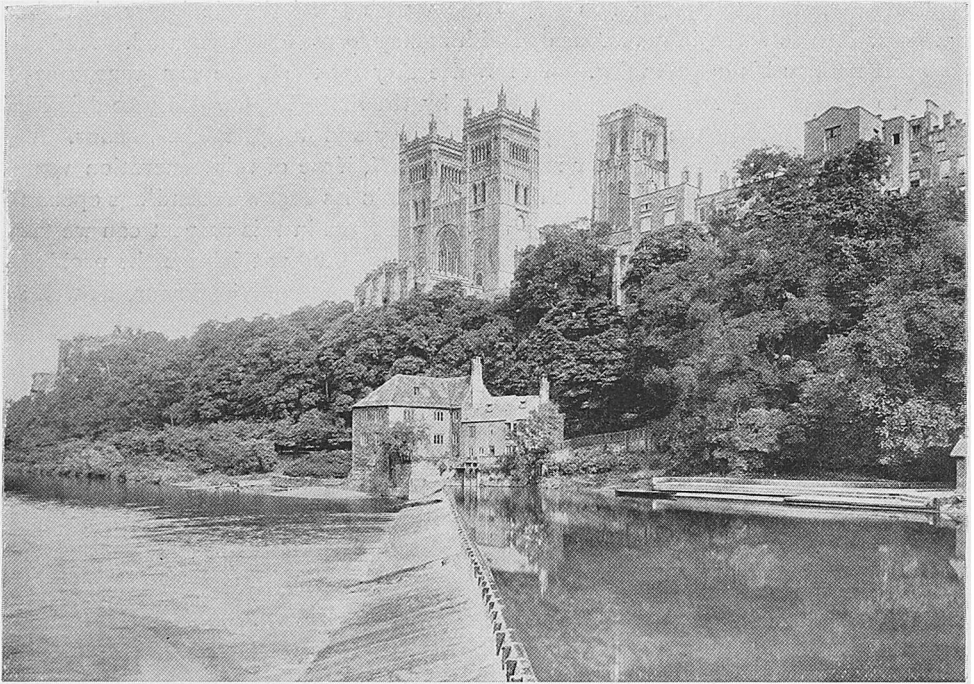
INTERIOR OF CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL.

instincts of a material age, and to stamp them with the indelible impression that art never fails to leave, in whatever one of its many forms it is presented. And the architect rose to his opportunity. The White City by the Lake has gone, maybe never to be replaced, and we are the poorer by the missed opportunity to drink in, through the senses of the eye, its pristine beauty and its priceless lessons. We must turn to foreign lands, to our regret be it said, if we of this generation would gauge the artistic possibilities which architecture in its best surroundings opens to sympathetic souls; and nowhere to greater advantage in this respect can we turn than to the cathedrals of England; for there we can study at leisure the problems of situation, of massing, of perspective, and of landscape environment, as well as the minor questions of style, form of decoration, and richness of detail.



THE FACADE OF LINCOLN CATHEDRAL.

"The English Cathedrals" is a term which has no significance from the broader architectural point of view; they are not a class, they cannot be grouped; each is the result of centuries of circumstances—artistic, geographical, religious, and historical. Yet, in the main, their situations and external forms have been regulated and influenced by two historical events, centuries apart, and both of comparatively ancient date: Firstly, by the evacuation of England by the Romans in the seventh century, and secondly, by the conquest of it by William of Normandy in the eleventh century. The influence of the religious Reformation in the sixteenth century, singularly enough, can scarcely be traced, and that of the seventeenth century has left its mark only upon the most trivial details, where the iconoclastic zeal of the furious Puritans demolished some fair tracery, or sculptured saint.



DURHAM CATHEDRAL AND THE MILL WEIR.

The cathedral architecture of England, indeed, owes more to Pagan Rome of the first five centuries than it does to the Reformation, and this is but natural, for



INTERIOR (NAVE) OF DURHAM CATHEDRAL.

Rome, during its lengthened and luxurious occupation, had covered the island with a network of colonies whose buildings, private, military, and religious, were the only fabrics possessing architectural features, and these mainly of the archaic simplicity of the first two centuries.

What more natural than that the early artificers should turn to the Roman buildings, then derelict and abandoned, for the material, and consequently, to some extent, for the design of their first Christian churches?



SALISBURY CATHEDRAL.

That it was so in many cases we know, and investigation would doubtless disclose more instances. It was thus that the semi-circular Romanesque arch became incorporated into the English ecclesiastical architecture. I know that, almost exclusively, this arch is ascribed to the Normans of the eleventh century; but it existed in English churches, from Roman ruins utilized in their structure, centuries before the Norman conquest—long before the Norman influences were felt.

Examples of this, very interesting in history and detail, might be shown in the two ancient churches within and just across the river from Cambridge. A third example will be found in the ruins of the church of Ethelberta, at Ely, the predecessor of the present cathedral. We have in this case a glimmer of historical light, too, for one of the Saxon chronicles records that the pious monks of Ely, seeking a fitting tomb for their foundress, went by water to Cambridge, and there found a fair white sarcophagus, in which they enshrined her remains. They found a great deal more than that—they discovered a quarry of ready-hewn Roman masonry, from which was erected the main part of their monastic building on the Isle.



ELY CATHEDRAL, FROM THE RIVER.

Under the Normans east, west, north, and south, arose cloister and chancel, shrine and sanctuary,—foundations upon which has been linked and rivetted every century of architecture from the eleventh to the seventeenth, with a perfection of harmony that is as astonishing as it is rich, varied, and successful. To them we owe the sombre grandeur and stable magnificence of the early portions of Durham, Ely, Winchester, Lincoln, Peterborough, and a host of others too great even to be mentioned : a style so simple, so abiding, so rich, and yet so Titanic as to suggest the massiveness of Carnac and the most antique Orient.

Few, very few, of the cathedrals escaped the influence of the sombre, solid,



WINCHESTER CATHEDRAL AND CHURCH-YARD.

Norman builder, and few, or none, escaped the progressive and lighter touch of the architects of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Of those which show no evidence of the heavier hand of the early Norman, we give two instances—St. Mary's, York, now, happily perhaps for its preservation, in ruins; and the Cathedral of Salisbury, the builders of which, by the oddest of accidental circumstances—the want of water—left their old home on the eyrie heights of Sarum, and built themselves a new shrine on the borders of the Wiltshire Avon. This gave a free hand to the contemporary architect, and no cathedral in England, or perhaps in the world, can compare with it for purity and unity of design, or for situation. Chancel and choir, nave and transept, rise like a fairy



THE FACADE OF YORK MINSTER.

structure from circumambient green sward; and, quivering with feathery details and gathering force and grace, it tapers away into the very heaven it symbolizes.

Only one other English cathedral can be compared with Salisbury for unity of design, and that is St. Paul's of London, but that is the only point of comparison; in every other circumstance they differ as widely as the poles. The one on the plain, sward-girt, tree-margined, free and open to every ray of sunlight from dawn to dusk, from lowest plinth to highest fane; the other, crowded into the very heart of a commercial metropolis, which seems to grudge even its foothold and hides from every point of view not only its base, but the greater part of its bulk. It is only from the vantage ground of the smoke-stacks of adjacent city roofs that its cross-tipped cupola and its classic upper stories can be seen. What inspiration but a Pagan one could have found lodgement in the imagination of an architect doomed to design a Christian temple on such a Mammon's site?

How different were the circumstances that gave birth to the second cathedral church of Ely, which in the eleventh century first crowned the silent fen-isle with glory to God. No town marred its perfect symmetry, no thought of the world, and they have left a very sanctuary of purity and an artistic monument of the centuries which still seems to float in an ærial sea. Then look at old Durham, which crowns the beetling crags and has, these eight centuries past, lifted its sacred front like a very fortress over the rude border lands; a warning to the lawless raiders of the marches and a sanctuary of the power that was mightier than the sword, before which even the mailed arm quailed. It stood there almost before man turned the silent hills and dales of the north into the debatable battleground of lawless chieftains and in more modern times into a beehive of commercial industries.

Canterbury stands midway betwixt fengirt Ely and crag-crowning Durham. Its



ST. MARY'S ABBEY.

history, true, is coincident and cœval with the re-introduction of Christianity into England by St. Augustine, and of that mission it is the mother-church; but the structure which now stands is, externally, rather an example of the later Gothic, the perpendicular, than of the styles prevailing at its historic birth. The sturdy strength and massive simplicity of the Norman and early English had become encrusted with the endless detail of tiers upon tiers of unnecessary buttresses and finials, and the graceful arch had given way to the graceless lines of a debased style before its nave and towers received their impress.

These be but a few of the object-lessons left to the student, the artist, and the seeker after things of beauty; and I have but touched, in a fragmentary and restricted way, upon *one* of the aspects of that beauty—"situation and environment"—with just so much of origin as appeared needful to elucidate that feature.